



Abby Johnson <abby@acj.carson-city.nv.us> on 10/19/2001 02:12:55 PM

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Subject: Site Consideration Comments, Abby Johnson, Carson City, NV

Part of Records Package / Supplement / Correction

Attached is the text of an opinion article that I wrote for Carson City's newspaper, the Nevada Appeal. The opinions expressed are mine, and this emailed comment is submitted as my personal opinion, and does not necessarily reflect the opinions of my nuclear waste clients.

Abby Johnson
617 Terrace Street
Carson City, NV 89703



- AbbyJohnsonOpinion.doc

The Pandora's box of terrorism mayhem is now wide open.

The September 11 terrorist attacks should have been a wake-up call for the U.S. Department of Energy and its secretary Spencer Abraham in their relentless pursuit of a nuclear waste dump at Yucca Mountain.

DOE needs to heed warnings, that they've heard from the public for years, that nuclear waste transportation shipments are vulnerable to terrorism and sabotage.

It's too bad that it takes a savage act of terrorism to force DOE to listen to common sense.

What about the many legitimate concerns that Yucca Mountain opponents have raised over the years?

Does there need to be an earthquake before that threat is taken seriously? Does the groundwater have to be contaminated with radioactivity before DOE acknowledges the problem of fast moving water? Does there need to be an actual attack on a nuclear waste shipment before DOE rethinks the wisdom of transcontinental nuclear waste shipments to Yucca Mountain.

DOE has just finished 29 mini-hearings in every Nevada county and Inyo County, CA. These poorly announced comment sessions were a belated attempt by the Department of Energy to make up for scheduling only three real hearings to ask citizens what they think about a repository at Yucca Mountain, Nevada.

I attended the first full hearing, on September 5, in Las Vegas. DOE bungled the hearing, leaving Jane and John Q. Public to wonder how the federal agency could be trusted to handle the safe transportation and disposal of nuclear waste.

The Secretary of Energy is required by law to "hold public hearings in the vicinity of the Yucca Mountain site, for the purposes of informing the residents of the area of such consideration [of Yucca Mountain as a repository] and receiving their comments regarding the possible recommendation of such site."

Here's how DOE handled that directive which was issued to them 14 years ago, in 1987. They initially scheduled only three hearings, interpreting "in the vicinity of the site" as Las Vegas, Amargosa Valley, and Pahrump. When Senator Reid requested hearings in Reno, Carson City, and Elko, DOE added video-conferencing of the Sept. 5 hearing at those remote sites rather than full hearings.

At DOE's well-guarded and obscure Nevada Test Site Operations Office, an overflow crowd of 500 packed the hearing room and the adjacent cafeteria where observers could watch the spectacle on big screens.

It soon became clear that DOE had rigged the hearing to ensure that pro-dump speakers dominated the early time slots in Las Vegas. Apparently DOE staff signed up speakers by telephone but did not tell the general public that they could pre-register to speak.

After the Governor, the congressional delegation and the spiritual leader of the Western Shoshone Nation spoke, six of the first nine speakers favored the project, and none were the ordinary Nevada citizens who showed up wanting to be heard.

At 9 p.m., a "Yucca Yes" union man (speaker # 11), endorsing the project for its great jobs, offended the woman next to me(#117).

"I'm in the AFL-CIO union too, and our local doesn't support the Yucca Mountain project," she said. "I asked my husband to stay with the kids tonight so I could come and speak, but with this number, I won't be able to speak. My ride leaves at 10 p.m., and then I have to go to work."

Families with children couldn't stay – the kids had to get to bed. It was after 10 o'clock when Las Vegans who had not pre-registered by telephone were permitted to speak for 5 minutes each.

DOE did provide a court reporter in a separate room to take testimony from those who had to leave. But as one speaker observed: it's supposed to be a *hearing*, where people are *heard*. Secretary of Energy Abraham heard no one. He sent a deputy to listen for him.

The hearing ended at 2:15 a.m. after the last speaker (#132) was called (only about half could stay to be heard.)

I can only conclude that DOE is sufficiently threatened about the viability of the Yucca Mountain project that they felt the need to give the pro-nukers the edge.

The hearing was a travesty. So is the assertion that Yucca Mountain will be "safe."

Earthquakes, volcanoes, groundwater seepage could all disqualify the site if DOE weren't in the process of eliminating disqualifying conditions from the guidelines.

Add in the ominous prospect of the resumption of underground nuclear weapons tests and the vulnerability of nuclear waste to terrorism and sabotage.

The Las Vegas hearing was an opportunity for DOE stop their advocacy for the project, to look Nevadans straight in the eye, and to listen to their thoughts about the Yucca Mountain project.

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DOE couldn't do it. They blinked in front of 500 witnesses. They were afraid to look Nevadans straight in the eye and listen to common sense. Now why would that be?